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Sen. Fulbright's Great Speech

NOTHING LESS than the highest praise should go to Senator Fulbright for his magnificent "dare to think" speech in the Senate on Wednesday. He is not getting precisely that kind of reception, however.

Many of his fellow legislators greeted Senator Fulbright with outcries which were reminiscent of children jumping up and down in a tantrum. That is one reason—among many—for giving the speech careful consideration; we have learned that when the chairman of the Republican National Committee denounces something of this kind (as he promptly did yesterday), it may have merit.

They have been living too long, Senator Fulbright told his fellow Senators, by a set of "self-evident truths" which have become cliches.

"WE ARE CLINGING," he went on, "to old myths in the face of new realities, and we seek to escape the contradictions by narrowing the permissible bounds of public discussion, by relegating an increasing number of ideas and viewpoints to a growing category of 'unthinkable thoughts' . . .

"The myth is that every Communist state is an unmitigated evil and a relentless enemy of the free world; the reality is that some Communist regimes pose a threat to the free world while others pose little or none, and that if we will recognize these distinctions, we ourselves will be able to influence events in the Communist bloc in a way favorable to the security of the free world."

These salutary remarks were delivered to a Senate chamber that was almost empty, by reason of the boredom of Senators over the civil rights bill filibuster. When, however, the Senators learned that Fulbright, the chairman of their Foreign Relations Committee, had had the gall to suggest that the Cuban blockade was a failure, their necks began to redden.

CASTRO, SAID FULBRIGHT, is a "distasteful nuisance but not an intolerable danger."

"Oh, ho," commented Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen, the Republican majority leader: "If you want to enhance communism in the Western Hemisphere, that would be a good cliché under which to do it."

But the point is, the cliches are on the other side of the table. Others than Fulbright have been thinking and speaking in cliches, in "self-evident truths" about American foreign policy. It is they who have failed to re-examine the question of Communist China, who bleat about carrying on any trade whatever with Communist countries, who roar about our honor being at stake in Panama, and who think and speak only in the blacks and whites of the cold war.

"WE MUST DARE," said Senator Fulbright, "to think about 'unthinkable things,' because when things become 'unthinkable,' thinking stops and action becomes mindless."

Not in a long time have we heard a sentiment more highly commendable to the President of the United States, to the Senate, to our Government officials and all citizens for their due meditation.